

Words Of Peace & Truth

No. 97: January – April 2016

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH

(*Esther 9:30; see also Zechariah 8:19*)

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Editorial

Reading recently about Absalom's usurpation of his father David's throne, I was struck by parallels with the present time. While the Antichrist (or "man of sin" – 2 Thessalonians 2:3) cannot be revealed while He who restrains (no doubt a reference to the Holy Spirit dwelling in the church) is still here, the *spirit* of antichrist is surely at work. Indeed, even in the time of the apostle John many antichrists were abroad, having gone out from the company of Christians (1 John 2:18, 19).

We might well be on our guard against someone who behaves in a coarse or belligerent manner but Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6) by feigned kindness and persuasive talking. The apostle Paul was concerned for the Colossian believers, "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words (*or, 'delude you by persuasive speech'*)." Their preservation would be by their occupation with the glories of Christ, knowing that they were complete – or 'filled full' – in Him.

As David, the rightful king, was exiled for a time, so our Lord Jesus is now rejected and absent. Even in circles where His name is invoked, His Person, work and words are effectively excluded. But as there were faithful souls like Ittai the Gittite (2 Sam. 15:21), so now there are, no doubt, many "that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). May we be among them! G.S.B.

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LESSONS FROM EZRA

From Chapter 3.

...
Then follows, as we judge, a note of sadness – “But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.” The people had responded largely to the grace and goodness of Jehovah in their restoration, and had rejoiced to place themselves under His protection, and had ordered His worship according as it was written in the law of Moses the man of God. But at present they went no farther. Instead of entering into God’s thoughts respecting His house, they rested in the blessings into which they had now been brought. Their spiritual energy had in measure expended itself in their first efforts, and their temptation was now to pause before going farther. Such has ever been the history of all real revivals in the church of God. Take, for example, that mighty work of God, of which Luther was the instrument. At the outset the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures was the battle-axe with which he waged war upon the corruptions and idolatries of Rome, and God wrought with him and granted a remarkable deliverance. But what followed? Luther, and his followers alike, rested in and feasted upon the fruits of their first victories, and the Reformation subsided into a system of State churches and creeds, out of which all vitality soon departed. (See Rev. 3:1-3.) They failed to go on in communion with the mind of God – they laboured for their own objects rather than His, and the consequence was that blight and decay soon showed themselves; the movement was arrested; and now, to-day, the very truths which were then recovered are fast fading away (if they have not already gone) from the very places which were the scene of the conflict.

We learn therefore that the safety of God’s people lies in their rising to the height of their calling. He calls us to fellowship with Himself, and with His Son Jesus Christ. If,

forgetting this, we are satisfied with the enjoyment of our blessings, and lose sight of God's desires for us, feebleness and decline will soon mark us, whether as individuals or as companies of believers. If, on the other hand, God's objects are ours, if our minds are set upon what is before Him, He will ever lead us on into fuller intelligence of His purposes of grace, as well as of His ways, and into larger blessedness. He delights in our happiness, and He would ever increase this by associating us in His grace with His own objects and aims.

If, however, the children of Israel did not prosecute the work of the Lord with all diligence, they were not unmindful of the purpose of their restoration; for, as we have seen, they began to make provision for the material wherewith to build the temple (v.7). To understand the circumstances of the remnant in contrast with the glory of the kingdom when Solomon's temple was built, 1 Kings 5, and 1 Chron. 28-29, should be read. Together with this, it should be remembered that Jehovah was the same, and that His resources were as available, through the exercise of faith, for this feeble remnant as for David and Solomon in all their power and splendour. True, they were outwardly dependent upon the grant of a Gentile monarch for permission to build, and for the means to secure the necessary materials; but it was God's work on which they were engaged, and, counting upon Him, He would enable them to prosecute it to a successful issue. When believers work with God, their apparent difficulties and obstacles become the servants of faith to bring God in, before whom crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain.

In this section the account is given of the actual laying of the foundation of the temple. An interval of at least seven months must be placed between verses 7 and 8. How it was spent is not

revealed. The ostensible ground for the pause, before commencing the work of building, would seem, from the connection, to be waiting for the “cedar trees.” However this might have been, “In the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord” (v.8). Three things are to be noted in this statement. Whatever the state of the people at large, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the governor and the priest, are foremost in the Lord’s work. Officially at the head, they retain the spiritual lead of the people. Happy is it for the people of God in every age, when their leaders are in the secret of the Lord’s mind, when they can call upon the people to follow them in His service. It is not always so: indeed, not infrequently the first action of the Spirit of God is in the midst of His people, and then the nominal leaders are set aside, or constrained to follow to preserve their place. Secondly, the governor and the priest know how to associate the people with themselves in their sacred enterprise. This is the sure mark of spiritual power on their part, as well as a testimony to the fact that God was working with them. Thus far there were no schisms, but all were banded together by the Holy Spirit for one common object. Lastly, we find that the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, were commissioned to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. This was evidently a recurrence to the scriptural order, arising out of a divine intelligence as to the nature of the work on which they were engaged. (See Numbers 4; 1 Chron, 23:24.) The maintenance of God’s order in the work of His house is of the first importance, for it is in fact subjection to His will as expressed in His word. To man’s thoughts some other method might have

seemed preferable; but the only question for the Lord's servants was, and is, What has He directed? From not perceiving this, there has been perpetual conflict in the church of God between man's will and the Lord's; and, alas! the consequence has been that man and man's thoughts have almost universally usurped the place of Christ and His word.

The Levites through grace readily entered upon their labours. There were but seventy-four. (See chap. 2:40.) In the wilderness, comprising only those who were "from thirty years old and upward, even unto fifty years old," they numbered "eight thousand and five hundred and eighty." (Numbers 4:46-48.) When the Lord therefore opened the door of deliverance for them from their Babylonish captivity, very few had cared to avail themselves of it; they had found a home, alas! in the land of their exile, and had forgotten Jerusalem, and ceased to remember Zion. The more precious to the Lord was the fidelity of those seventy-four, and with His presence and blessing they were enough for His service as overseers of the workmen in the house of God. Grace too had wrought in their hearts, for they stood "together," or, as the margin reads, "as one" in their office. This was true fellowship, and sprang from the fact that they were in communion with the mind of God concerning His house. His objects were theirs, and hence they were not hampered by divided counsels; but "as one" they set forward the workmen. Blessed augury for the success of their enterprise, as well as the evident fruit of the action of the Spirit of God!

The next two verses describe the celebration of the laying of the foundation. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And

they sang together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid (vv. 10, 11). It was a day of great joy and gladness; and as they had gone back to the word, “as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God,” for directions concerning the altar, the sacrifices, and the feasts, so they have recourse to “the ordinance of David king of Israel,” for guidance in their service of praise. (Compare 2 Chron. 5:12, 13.) In the wilderness indeed we do not read of songs of joy; they had sung the song of redemption on the banks of the Red Sea, but even that soon died away on their lips, and was succeeded by the murmurs which were begotten by the hardships and perils of their pilgrim journey. But when in the land the ark had found a resting-place, if but for a time, in Zion, David “appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel.” Also Asaph and others were to play upon psalteries and harps, Asaph himself was to make a sound with cymbals, while certain priests were to blow with trumpets. “On that day David delivered first the psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hand of Asaph and his brethren,” in which the words occur, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever” (1 Chron. 16). Few and feeble therefore as were the children of Israel who gathered this day on mount Moriah, they were scrupulously exact in obedience to the Word. Engaged on the Lord’s work, they discerned rightly that in it human thoughts and human wisdom had no place. The Lord and the Lord alone must prescribe the method of His house.

Three classes are distinguished in this joyful celebration: there were the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the sons of Asaph with cymbals; and there were outside of these the

people who answered the praise they heard with a great shout, because the foundation of the house of Lord was laid. None but priests were permitted to blow with the sacred trumpets (see Numbers 10), for it needs to be in the holy place, in the presence of God, in communion with His mind, to discern when to sound the notes of testimony and praise. So likewise only the sons Asaph – Levites, “according to the king’s order” – must use the sacred cymbals (1 Chronicles 25:6). Thus duly arranged, “they sang together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord, and the burden of their song was, “Jehovah is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.”

But there were tears of sorrow mingled with their notes of praise; for the next verse tells us of many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, those who had seen Solomon’s temple in all glory and splendour, and as they contrasted it with house they were now commencing, they wept with a loud voice, while the others shouted aloud for joy. And the tears of the one and the gladness of the other befitted the circumstances of the day; for those who had seen the glory of the kingdom and the visible cloud of the presence of Jehovah in the first temple, and who were now spectators of the desolations of Jerusalem, and felt their present impoverished condition, and their feebleness in attempting to build anew the house of the Lord, it was but natural, whatever their gratitude, that grief should predominate. For those, on the other hand, who remembered only their captivity in Babylon, with its deprivation of both altar and temple, it could be nothing but unmingled gratitude and praise. ...

From Chapter 6.

...

And faith was in exercise in these children of the captivity; for we find that they offered a sin-offering for all Israel. All

Israel was not there – only representatives of two or three tribes; but these few were on the ground of the nation before God, and they understood this, and thus included in their sin-offering all the tribes of Israel. This is surely a significant lesson for the remnant gathered out in these last days to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be but few, and both poor and feeble; but if they enter into the truth of their position, they will include in their hearts and in their prayers all the members of the one body. In spirit they will occupy the ground on which they have been set “with all the saints;” or otherwise they will but add another to the many sects which already divide the Church of God. This becomes easy when faith is in lively exercise; for the faith that on the one hand links itself with God, on the other links itself with all His people.

They were also characterized at this moment by obedience. They regulated the service of the house – the priests and the Levites, “as it is written in the book of Moses.” The path of obedience, whether for the individual or for the assembly, is the only path of blessing. At such a time – just when the house of God was completed – it would have appeared folly to them for man to have intruded his thoughts into the house of God. Their only concern was to know what God had said – what He had directed. So was it when the house of God was built at Pentecost, in the apostolic church; and so was it when God graciously permitted the revival of the truth of the Church at the beginning of this [19th] century. But what happened after the departure of the apostles has happened again – as also with the remnant, as will be seen in the closing chapter of Ezra – that is, the word of God as the sole regulator of His house is often displaced by man for his own convenience, or for his own wisdom. No danger is more subtle than the gradual creeping into the assembly of human thoughts and arrangements in substitution for the word of God. In

effect, although not so intended, it is the deposition of the Lord from His place of supremacy over His people. There never was a time, therefore, when it was more necessary to remember the words of our risen Lord: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Extracted from "Ezra, or, Restoration from Babylon: an Exposition by Edward Dennett" [1896].

THE RACE AND THE GOAL

Romans 6:6-12; Colossians 2:6 and 3:1-5

I HAVE referred to these verses in connection with the subject of "the race set before us" and the goal, which is Christ in glory.

Paul had been so taken possession of in his affections by personal acquaintance with Christ that he could say to the saints "Be followers of me, as I also am of Christ." In the Epistle to the Philippians he presents himself simply as the servant, or bondsman, of Jesus Christ. It is not as apostle that he writes, to unfold the great truths of Christianity, but simply as a Christian, to stimulate others to follow hard after Christ, as he was himself doing. And this is important, because as apostle he had a place which no other had, while all that was true of him as a Christian is possible also for us. As believers in Christ we learn that we too are called to be His bondsmen, and we all ought heartily to take this place. The bondsman is the purchased property of his master, who has absolute control over him, and Paul gloried in this thought in his relation to Christ. If at liberty, he was Christ's slave; if in prison, still *His* prisoner, and content to be wherever his Master placed him, or allowed him to be

placed. The love of Christ had captivated and was still constraining him, so that he was prepared to endure anything for Him, and was only desirous to reach Him where He is. He makes known, to us this secret in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. This is the true Christian path and it is a very simple one, though there be no room in it for the flesh. You may say it makes great demands; but there really is no other for the Christian.

This raises the question: why are we left here on earth as Christians? God could have taken us away to heaven immediately we were converted – but this is not generally His way. The thief, who was converted on the cross at the very last hour of his life, went straight to the paradise of God that day. There have been many death-bed conversions since, we know. But, as a rule, Christians are left many years on the earth and it is important that we should understand the object God has in view in this.

It is that Christ may be formed in us by the work of His Spirit in our hearts (Gal 4:19) and that thus, during His absence in heaven, there might be a living witness to Him on earth. As God said of Israel in days gone by, “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” (Isaiah 43:21). So now the beautiful moral traits of Christ are produced in His own down here as this formative work of the Spirit proceeds. Let us see to it that we are not grieving the Spirit and so hindering His work.

It is a blessed thing to be turned to God in early years and then to accept the truth that you are not your own but “bought with a price,” bondslaves of Christ and of God, to be here henceforth for His glory in the path of His will.

And this is the thought of God for us: may we have grace to answer to it!

But to do so we must have Christ Himself, where He is in glory, as the goal to which we are running. Doctrine of course is most necessary – we cannot get on without teaching, but there is great danger of making a mental study of doctrine and so missing the whole object of it, which is that we should be so affected by it, in the Spirit's power, as to become different kind of people.

Paul, the Christian, in this Epistle to the Philippians, is the expression of the moral effect upon himself of all the truth which he sets forth, doctrinally, in his other epistles, so that he can exhort others to be “followers of me and to mark them that walk so.” The Christian's safety is to rejoice in the Lord (chap. 3, vv.1, 2), to have Him as the object of the heart and so to exclude those idols which would usurp His place and God's place in the heart.

Oh, that the living, glorious Christ may be so before our souls in His great love that we may be constrained to go after Him – to press toward the mark! Coming now to Romans 6: 6, we see the expression of His great love to us in this, that He endured crucifixion as God's judgment upon “our old man,” so that we might not be in slavery to sin. We are entitled *to know* that “our old man has been crucified with him,” and as those that have died in His death we are justified from guilt (verse 7). It never can be laid to our charge. But then it is the love of Christ, in going thus into death for us, which has secured us this liberty, and the effect it has upon us is to draw our hearts in the response of love to Him. So we are prepared to start upon the race to reach Him where He is. It is love to Him, in response to

His great love for us, which starts us, and He values the affections of His own.

Then, passing on, let me ask, Have you ever weighed verses 10 and 11? The first speaks of Christ, the next of *us*. “In that he died, he died unto sin once.” It is not sins which are in view here, but the principle of sin. He came into a world characterised by sin, *i.e.*, lawlessness and independence of God, but He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Then at the end of His pathway of perfection, lifted up upon the cross, He was *made sin* for us, bore the judgment of God upon it, and passed out of that condition by death. He lived always to God when in this world of sin, but now He lives to God where sin can never come, and in verse 11 we are exhorted to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed to sin, as identified with His death, and alive to God in Him, Christ Jesus our Lord.

But what I desire to emphasise is that He endured all this because of His great love for us, and He looks for response from our hearts. Paul is an example to us of a heart wholly won, and his controlling desire was, in his own words, “that I may know him.” May this be the case with us too!

Now Colossians carries us further than Romans. In this latter epistle we see Christ risen from the dead, and alive to God, after having died to sin once for all; and we are entitled to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. But in Colossians we are taught to take resurrection ground, as **RISEN WITH CHRIST**. These three last words are the key to the teaching of this epistle, and they are not found in Romans. They speak of new ground taken, and not merely of clearance from liabilities and of a new life upon the old ground.

This new ground is that upon which God sees His saints to-day, and their privilege is, by faith, to take account of

themselves as God takes account of them. Here is the verse: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen together through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Chap. 2, v. 12).

There are thus three steps in faith :

(1) Faith in His blood (Rom. 3); (2) Faith in God who raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 4) and (3) Faith in the operation of God, by which we are *risen with Christ* (Col. 2). Until this last step be taken we are not on proper Christian ground in our soul’s apprehension. It becomes us therefore to ask ourselves whether we have taken it. If we have, then our desire will be, as Paul’s was, to reach Christ actually where He is in glory.

Let us beware then of taking up Christian doctrine as a mental study, but rather seek grace to set our mind on things above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God. So the Spirit of God will lead us on, weaning our hearts from all that is on the earth, and fixing them more and more upon Christ as their Object.

The Lord grant it for His name’s sake.

Revised notes of an address by A.S. Loughnan, reproduced from “The Believer’s Friend” Volume II (1910).

Fragment

(John 6:13)

When things seem desperate, then is the time to rest in God against all appearances, against all that man can see. Faith looks at nothing but at the fathomless depths of the goodness of God.

William Farel (1489-1565)

DILIGENCE NEEDED TO GO ON TO GOD'S PURPOSE

Hebrews 6:13-20

I WOULD try and say a few words on this scripture in connection with what has been before us. I think we must all feel how serious a thing it is that man after the flesh habitually despises the things of God, and we need to take to heart that that is what we all do naturally, and necessarily there is the danger for us: the flesh is the great hindrance to our going on to the purpose of God. The purpose of God for us is that we should be "holy and without blame before him in love," His sons, and in this scripture His beloved Son has entered into His presence for us as the Forerunner.

"He's gone within the veil,

For *us* that place has won;"

so that we have "strong consolation," or rather "encouragement," "who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." The good pleasure of God about us is that we should have this "strong encouragement." All our hope now is in another Man, the Man of God's purpose who *has* entered in for *us*. He is there the Forerunner, and we follow: so that not only have we "strong encouragement," but the hope is an anchor of the soul "both sure and stedfast [or secure and firm], and which entereth into that within the veil," into that blessed scene where *He* is. Nothing but what is of Christ can enter that scene: it is to me so beautifully expressed in those words –

"There all's unsullied light,

Our hearts let in its rays;

And heavenly light makes all things bright

Seen in that blissful gaze." (*J.N. Darby*)

Such a scene would be intolerable to the man after the flesh; we can only come in touch with it as after *His* order who has entered there for us.

When the report of the land was brought to Israel they refused to go in, so they had to go back into the wilderness and die. In Numbers 14:28 we get, “Say unto them, as truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcases shall fall in this wilderness,” &c.; and in verse 31, “But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which *ye have despised*.” So God was wroth with them for forty years, because they *despised the land* – the purpose of God for *them*; so in chapter 3 of this epistle (ver. 17) we get “And with whom was he wroth forty years? Was it not with those who had sinned, whose *carcases fell in the wilderness?*” The tendency with us is to drop down and settle here, and if our souls are not anchored within the veil, we wander in the wilderness; but if anchored, we pass on to the purpose of God; we pass through this scene under the power of a better hope, stayed by divine joy.

“And stayed by joy divine,
As hireling fills his day:
Through scenes of strife and desert-life ,
We tread in peace our way.”

As long as we are here there is danger, and we need to show “diligence to the full assurance of hope *unto the end*, that ye be not slothful.” I think it comes home pretty close to us as to how far slothfulness of soul is hindering us going on to the real entering in to divine purpose. It comes on us insidiously, “a *little* more sleep and a *little* more slumber” (Proverbs 6:10 and 24:33). The Lord preserve us from it and keep us in healthy

exercise of soul so that we may be “imitators of those who *through faith and long patience* have been inheritors of the promises.”

The blessed God would have us enter into the unchangeableness of His purpose, so that we might have *strong encouragement*, and we see His blessed purpose about us set forth and made good to us in Jesus who has entered *for us* into that scene of unsullied light, the very presence of God!

The Lord graciously encourage us to go on in spite of all the pressure here, in “faith and long patience” in the good of that hope which enters into that within the veil where our blessed Forerunner is; so that we may be in happy accord with the “earnest desire” of the beloved writer of the epistle “that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope *unto the end.*”

R.M.

Message given during meetings at Quemerford, England, in May 1898.

NEW BIRTH

John 3:1-9

This is the sovereign action of God. The first statement made by the Lord to Nicodemus is very simple and broad: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He shows that man must have an entirely new beginning, otherwise he has no capacity for the discernment of that which is of God. This is therefore evidently not that which is wrought by testimony, but that which must precede testimony in order that when testimony is presented it may be received. God may, however, thus work while a man is under the sound of testimony. The mark which is found with a man in whom God has begun to work is, that

his self-sufficiency breaks down. Thus it may have been even with Nicodemus himself; for the coming to Jesus by night was scarcely the action of a self-satisfied man. It is no doubt significant that this truth should be presented to one of such rank and ability as he was. The necessity of man thus having a totally new beginning shows what a complete ruin he is toward God; there is nothing on which He can build.

The second statement made by the Lord goes further than the first; “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He shows the new origin from which man springs, and, in the words which follow, shows that that which springs from such an origin partakes of its character; “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The figure of water, which indicates moral cleansing, implies reception of testimony, and seems to be in agreement with the end of I Peter 1. The expression “born *of God*” must also be noticed in this connection. It is found in John 1 and in John’s epistle, and views man as having his origin from God, and thus bearing His character. The words which John, Peter and James use for our being born again are different. James speaks of our being brought forth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures; it is the same word as “sin, when it is finished, *bringeth forth* death.”

It is not that there are different kinds of new birth. It is a figurative expression signifying man’s completely new beginning under the power of the Spirit of God. The first touch of divine power may therefore be considered, that which is necessary to enable a man to receive testimony. But the work of God in order to bring into true Christian

condition may be looked at as a whole, and therefore as taking its character from the testimony which has been presented and received.*

The effect which this will have upon the servant of the Lord is that he will refrain from attempting to impress men by the way in which he sets forth divine things; he will present the light of the gospel to all, but with the inward conviction that his testimony will only be received where God has wrought. He will feel, too, the desirability of guidance in his work, that he may be led to present the truth where souls are prepared for it. Even in Paul's day he was forbidden to preach the word in Asia, and when he sought to go into Bithynia the Spirit of Jesus suffered him not. Yet, when he reached Philippi, the first of whom we read, whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul, was an Asiatic, Lydia, the seller of purple from Thyatira. All this shows the sovereignty of God.

New birth is not a subject of testimony in preaching † to men, because it belongs to the sovereignty of God. The apostles were sent forth to preach repentance and remission of sins, for these things are on the line of man's responsibility.

Brief note of a Bible reading with J. Revell in 1899.

**Perhaps 1 Peter 1:23 is an example of this more embracing use of the expression "born again" – Editor.*

*†The Lord brought to Nicodemus's attention the **need** for new birth but didn't tell him to 'get born again.' Neither does such an exhortation feature in any of the preachings recorded in the Acts.*

PRAISE AND OBEDIENCE

Isaiah 43:21; Philippians 2:12-15

Many years ago I was struck by reading a comment in a book of ministry that obedience is the only evidence, save praise, of life according to God. I have thought of that comment several times since and meditated upon it and for some reason when I was walking to the meeting room this morning it came back into my mind; and I think it may be profitable if we just ponder that thought.

I believe that it is a true remark. Surely the truth of anything is shown by looking at the Lord Jesus and as I think about His life here on earth I can't think of anything that was not covered by those two principles, obedience and praise.

It's a wonderful thing to have life according to God. It has required the sovereign action of God in us. As we know, in the Epistle to the Romans we are viewed as alive in sin and we are brought to the point where we are dead to it. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we are taken up as dead towards God but made alive towards Him: "**you**, being dead in your offences and sins ... God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love wherewith He loved us ... has quickened us with the Christ" – in other words, has made us to live. How thankful we should be for life sovereignly communicated by God, a different kind of life entirely from what is viewed as life in the world around. But I feel challenged as to myself, as to these two evidences that should be seen from me of life according to God.

And I begin with praise, which is why I read this verse in Isaiah 43.* (*See p. 21.*) Again, let us look at the Lord Jesus. S mentioned in his prayer the advantage of looking away from ourselves to Him, and may we keep doing that; He is the display of

everything that is right according to God. Everything in Christ is pleasing to God and anything that is outside of Christ is displeasing to Him. And just think of the Lord Jesus here on earth. We read of Him in Matthew chapter 11, where He had been rejected by those cities where He had done such great acts of power and He had had to pronounce woes upon them; but then He turns to His Father and says, “I praise Thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes.” We read in this same prophecy of Isaiah (*chapter 49*) how the Lord felt, apparently labouring in vain, and spending His strength for nought and in vain, and yet He could stand there in the presence of rejection and say, ‘Father, I praise Thee.’ And according to Psalm 22 it seems that the Lord’s first thought when He had been answered after all His sufferings was to praise His Father in the midst of the great congregation; and that is taken up in Hebrews 2, where we have this lovely picture of the Lord Jesus singing praises to His God and Father through those whom He has redeemed, through His church. What an example the Lord Jesus is of ready praise to our God and Father!

Now here, of course, the prophet is speaking of Israel, and we know that they have failed as a nation; they have come short, badly, of God’s purposes for them. Yet we believe that those purposes will be fulfilled through Christ in a coming day. But now we through wonderful grace find our part in the assembly of God which He has purchased with the blood of His Own. And I ask myself, how much am I taking up my privilege of uttering praise to God through the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit? God

**In the history of a soul obedience must come first; the gospel of God is preached for the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5 and 16:26). But here we are treating of the continuing Christian life.*

looks for it. I sometimes think – and I wouldn't press this dogmatically, but it is how things in Scripture appeal to me – that we worship God for who He is, we praise Him for all He has done and we thank Him for all His mercies and benefits. As I say, I wouldn't put hard and fast definitions on these things but I think there is some evidence for that.

But now I turn to Philippians. At the beginning of this chapter we have the gracious, condescending movements of the Lord Jesus. I don't think I have more than a very small impression of what it must have meant to Christ, who was in the form of God, in the place of command, to come into a place of obedience. He “emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form.” We know it was for our sakes that He, being rich, became poor. “Having been found in figure as a man, (He) humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death.” He was the true burnt-offering; He glorified God in His life and by His obedience even unto death. S referred to His agony in the garden: “if it be possible let this cup pass from Me;” but “nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done” – utterly obedient, no rebellion against God's will whatever.

We read in Hebrews, that He learned obedience through the things which He suffered. That doesn't mean to say that there was anything disobedient within Him that He had to overcome. I think it means it was a new experience; He came into a place of service, of subjection, of obedience, for God's glory and for our sakes. What a study He is!

But then where we read the apostle goes on to exhort obedience upon the Philippian believers: “So that, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation in fear and trembling.” We have been “saved for glory! yes, for glory, by the work of God's blest Son,” but there are things we

have to work out as saved people, as the children of God here. We have that reference to us further down: “that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation.” The generation around us – and this, alas, includes large parts of Christendom, if not the whole of it in some way or other – is marked by disobedience to God and His word, relying on man’s initiative and enterprise.

But as I think of the rest of the Christian life as presented in the Scriptures, I believe it is all covered by this principle of obedience – not that we are under the law of Moses or under law of any sort, but the Lord Jesus says, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” The Lord Jesus obeyed His Father out of love and we are to obey Him out of love.

Peter speaks in his first Epistle about our being children of obedience, and here we have in our hands God’s holy word; and with the Lord Jesus before our hearts and the Holy Spirit enabling us it should be our joy and pleasure to obey what the Lord sets before us, not only what He has said personally, recorded in the gospels, but what He has given to us through the apostles since He arose and ascended to God’s right hand. May it be increasingly our delight to fulfil the will of the Lord in obedience.

I know the clock is moving on but let me say one more thing: something I observe in Christendom today is that some are inclined to abstract general principles from the word and ignore specific instructions. With this embracing of immorality in some quarters in Christendom, those kinds of argument have been advanced: ‘Oh, we want to show love,’ as if sin can be overlooked on the basis that we are to love one another. But the Bible makes quite clear that God’s love does not overlook sin; God’s love provides the *remedy* for sin, so that we can be right with Him: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and

sent His Son a propitiation *for our sins.*” But people will do that today; they will say, well, we need to be peaceable, we need to be loving, we need to be gentle. These things are perfectly true, but I remember years ago, when I had to study a little law, there was a principle (and I won’t attempt to give the Latin maxim in which it was couched*) that in construing Acts of Parliament you cannot use a *general* provision to overpower a *specific* one. And we have specific instructions in the Scriptures as to our individual paths, as to relationships in the home, as to the conduct of business, as to how we gather together as believers in the Lord Jesus and as to what is proper to the house of God. Many, many instructions are given to us, and they are given to us, surely, because they reflect the mind and desire of God about us. Let us not brush them aside under the cloak of generalities, but as it was the delight of the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth to fulfil everything His Father desired of Him, may it be our desire to be truly children of obedience, that we may reflect the character of the Lord Jesus more while we are left here.

Well, I just offer these remarks as to these two evidences of life according to God, praise and obedience.

Word given by G.S.B. in an open meeting for ministry, 4th October 2015.

** The Latin maxim is *generalia specialibus non derogant*, meaning “the general does not detract from the specific.” It signifies a basic principle of statutory interpretation, namely that when a matter falls under any *specific* provision it must be governed by that, rather than any *general* provision. Of course, there may be contradictions between the statutes made by human governments, whereas there are no contradictions in the Bible. Still, we may (wrongly) plead some general biblical principle to offset a specific biblical injunction. Editor.*

Andrew, a Disciple

He hath shown thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with thy God? *Micah 6:8*

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Matthew 25:21

Andrew is one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Much less known than John or Simon Peter, he is not the author of a gospel or of an epistle. Little is said about him ... But on three occasions, Andrew intervenes very appropriately:

- When he met Jesus, his first concern was to find his brother Simon and lead him to Jesus (John 1:42). Simon would become the apostle Peter ... God used a humble and self-effacing disciple to bring to Jesus the one that would be a better known apostle in what followed. Let us stay attentive to the Master, available to be humbly in his service.

- Jesus commanded his disciples to feed a hungry crowd, but the disciples had nothing. Then Andrew speaks to Jesus of a "little boy who has five barley loaves and two small fishes" (John 6:9). It's little, but he draws attention to it anyway, because Jesus is there. And thanks to him, the little resources of the child are entrusted to Jesus, who multiplies them. The crowd is nourished and satisfied.

- Shortly before Jesus' death, Greeks express the desire to see Him. They speak to Philip, who informed Andrew. And, together, they speak to their Master (John 12:20-22). It was thus by means of Andrew that these Greeks are led to Jesus.

So the simple and discreet interventions of Andrew were the source of great blessings.

Do not seek to be known. Like Andrew, let us simply and faithfully accomplish the little things that the Lord puts within our reach.

And leave with Him the work of producing a rich blessing.

Translated from “La Bonne Semence,” (the Good Seed) 15th April 2016.

Fragment

(John 6:13)

Concerning the alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab (*see I Kings 22*):-

Such is the history of the alliance of believers, not only with unbelievers, but with the unfaithful. The latter are very willing that we should go with them; but to walk in the ways of truth is another thing. This is not the question with them; if they so walked, they would cease to be unfaithful. A true union would necessarily have made Jerusalem the centre and capital of the land: for Jehovah and His temple were there. The alliance took it for granted that Jehoshaphat had given up all such idea, since it showed that he recognised Ahab in his position. There is no equality in an alliance between truth and error; since, by this very alliance, truth ceases to be truth, and error does not thereby become truth. The only thing lost is the authority and obligation of the truth.

Extracted from “Synopsis of the Books of the Bible” by J.N. Darby, Vol. 1, p. 396 (later edition).

POETIC PAGES

Alone and not Alone

1. Centre of heaven's delight!
 Angelic praise
Heralds Thine advent night;
 On Thee they gaze.
Angels their God can see
Robed in humanity,
Veiling divinity,
 Yet all alone.

2. Son of the carpenter
 Men callèd Thee.
God ever blest! Divine
 Eternally.
Yes! Here Thy glory shone,
Thou meek and lowly One;
Fulness of God made known
 Only in Thee.

3. Treading Thy path alone,
 Shame and despite
From those who were Thine own,
 Shunning Thy light.
Friend of the desolate,
Sad and disconsolate;
Pouring out love on hate,
 Thou wast alone.

4. Yet joy did fill Thy heart
Doing God's will.
Nought swerved Thee from Thy part,
All to fulfil.
Perfect dependent Man,
Thou didst completely span
All God's redemption plan,
Yet wast alone.
5. Thy face, O Lord, was set,
Set as a flint;
Till all God's claims were met
Thou didst not shrink.
All men withheld from God
Thou payedst with Thy blood;
Man's Substitute to God,
All, all alone.
6. In dark Gethsemane,
There all alone,
None knew Thine agony,
Not e'en Thine own.
Sleep on, disciples, sleep.
Rest while your Lord doth weep.
None can His vigil keep;
He was alone.
7. Yet onward still to go,
On to the cross;
Drink deep that cup of woe
At bitter cost.

All from Thee then did flee
When on th' accursèd tree
God hid His face from Thee;
Truly alone.

8. Into death's dark domain,
Entered alone.
Death had on Thee no claim,
Thou sinless One.
He who had death's dread power
Met Thee in that dark hour,
Vanquished by Thee his power,
By Thee alone.
9. But Thou hast burst the grave,
Risen art Thou.
Death could not Thee enslave;
Death had to bow.
Victorious hast Thou come
Out of the darksome tomb,
Broken the bands of gloom;
Beyond death now.
10. What mighty triumphs, Lord,
Thou hast achieved;
What fruitfulness has God
From Thee received.
Out of Thy death has sprung
A wondrous living throng;
All, all to Thee belong,
By Thee conceived.

11. Thou art the firstborn One;
 Lowly we bow;
Chief in Thy Father's love,
 Chief to us now.
Thou art indeed supreme,
Our great eternal theme,
Worthy of all esteem;
 Worthy art Thou.
12. Formed for Thy bride to be,
 Fashioned in death;
Companion meet for Thee,
 Breathing Thy breath.
Love gains its whole desire:
Thy beauty her attire,
In her all will admire
 Thy glories' wealth.

The above poem by Leslie G. Milner was found recently among the papers of his nephew Leslie A. Everitt and will be recognised by many readers as the source of the two hymns "Thou, Lord, to death's domain Didst go alone" and "O Lord, Thy face was set, Set steadfastly," which have appeared in several editions of "Hymns & Spiritual Songs for the Little Flock." Another nephew of Mr. Milner thinks that there were originally 17 verses and that the poem was composed circa 1911.

Five Little Pebbles

Five little pebbles lay in a brook;
Five little pebbles lay in a nook.
"What are we good for?" one said to the other,

“Little or nothing, I’m thinking, my brother.”

Wearing away, day after day,

It seemed that for ever those pebbles might stay.

If they were flowers, ever so gay,

Doubtless someone would take them away;

Or if they were big stones that builders could use,

Perhaps then some builder those pebbles would choose.

Wait, little pebbles, rounded and clean,

Long in your loneliness, lying unseen:

God has a future awaiting for you,

Five little pebbles, sturdy and true.

Five little pebbles, hid in a brook;

David came down and gave them a look,

Picked them up carefully out of the sand,

Five *little* pebbles, *great* in his hand.

“Hark!” there is shouting, there’s fighting today;

Boldly those pebbles are borne to the fray,

One of them chosen and put in a sling.

Could we have thought that a stone could thus wing?

Onward it sped with a might not its own;

Onward it sped, by a shepherd boy thrown,

Swift as an arrow, straight as a dart;

For the whole nation that stone played its part,

Striking the giant’s great terrible head,

Laying him low – a mighty man dead.

Five little pebbles lay in a brook,

Mentioned with honour in God’s Holy Book. /P.T.O.

Be thou a pebble, contented and low,
Ever kept clean by His mercy's pure flow,
Hidden and ready till Jesus shall look
And choose *you* and use *you*, a stone from the brook.

S.J.B. Carter (1858-1938)

NOTE

The Editor trusts that the selection and composition of material for this magazine has been undertaken with the Lord's guidance and that the contents are of moral and spiritual value and appropriate to present needs. The only infallible statement of truth, however, is found in the Holy Bible and the reader is, therefore, urged to follow the practice of the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Editor is always happy to receive comments and inquiries, and to consider suggested articles for inclusion in future issues.